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From the Author

A

# DISCOURSE, &c.

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[PRICE THREE SHILLINGS.]

A

# DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED TO THE

# STUDENTS

OF THE

# ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

Distribution of the Prizes, Dec. 10, 1790.

BY THE

# PRESIDENT.

Reynolds (Sir J.) K.

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M, DCC, XCI.

# DISCOURSE, &c.

*GENTLEMEN,*

THE intimate connection which I have had with the ROYAL ACADEMY ever ſince its eſtabliſhment, the ſocial duties in which we have all mutually engaged for ſo many years, make any profeſſion of attachment to this Inſtitution, on my part, altogether ſuperfluous; the influence of habit alone in ſuch a connection would naturally have produced it.

AMONG men united in the ſame body, and engaged in the ſame purſuit, along with permanent friendſhip, occaſional differences will ariſe. In theſe diſputes men are naturally too favourable to themſelves, and think perhaps too hardly of their antagoniſts. But compoſed and conſtituted as we are, thoſe little contentions will be loſt to others, and they ought certainly to be loſt amongſt ourſelves, in mutual eſteem for talents and ac-

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quirements: every controverſy ought to be, and I am perſuaded, will be, ſunk in our zeal for the perfection of our common Art.

In parting with the Academy, I ſhall remember with pride, affection, and gratitude, the ſupport with which I have almoſt uniformly been honoured from the commencement of our intercourſe. I ſhall leave you, Gentlemen, with unaffected cordial wiſhes for your future concord, and with a well-founded hope, that in that concord, the auſpicious and not obſcure origin of our Academy may be forgotten in the ſplendor of your ſucceeding proſpects.

My age, and my infirmities ſtill more than my age, make it probable that this will be the laſt time I ſhall have the honour of addreſſing you from this place. Excluded as I am, *ſpatiis iniquis*, from indulging my imagination with a diſtant and forward perſpective of life, I may be excuſed if I turn my eyes back on the way which I have paſſed.

We may aſſume to ourſelves, I ſhould hope, the credit of having endeavoured, at leaſt, to fill with propriety, that middle ſtation which we hold in the general connection

nection of things. Our predeceſſors have laboured for our advantage, we labour for our ſucceſſors; and though we have done no more in this mutual intercourſe and reciprocation of benefits, than has been effected by other ſocieties, formed in this nation for the advancement of uſeful and ornamental knowledge, yet there is one circumſtance which appears to me to give *us* an higher claim than the credit of merely doing our duty. What I at preſent allude to, is the honour of having been, ſome of us, the firſt contrivers, and all of us the promoters and ſupporters of the annual Exhibition. This ſcheme muſt of courſe have originated from Artiſts already in poſſeſſion of the favour of the public, as it would not have been ſo much in the power of others to have excited their curioſity. It muſt be remembered, that for the ſake of bringing forward into notice concealed merit, they incurred the riſk of producing rivals to themſelves, they voluntarily entered the liſts, and ran the race a ſecond time for the prize which they had already won.

When we take a review of the ſeveral departments of the Inſtitution, I think we may ſafely congratulate ourſelves on our good fortune of having hitherto ſeen the chairs of our profeſſors filled with men of diſtinguiſhed abilities, and who have ſo well acquitted themſelves of their

their duty in their ſeveral departments. I look upon it to be of importance, that none of them ſhould be ever left unfilled; a neglect to provide for qualified perſons, is to produce a neglect of qualifications.

In this honourable rank of Profeſſors, I have not preſumed to claſs myſelf, though in the Diſcourſes which I have had the honour of delivering from this place, I may in one reſpect be conſidered as a volunteer, in another view it ſeems as if I was involuntarily preſſed into this ſervice.

If prizes were to be given, it appeared not only proper, but almoſt indiſpenſibly neceſſary, that ſomething ſhould be ſaid by the Preſident on the delivery of thoſe prizes; and the Preſident for his own credit would wiſh to ſay ſomething more than mere words of compliment, which by being frequently repeated, would ſoon become flat and unintereſting, and by being given to many, would at laſt become a diſtinction to none: I thought, therefore, if I were to preface this compliment with ſome inſtructive obſervations on the Art, when we crowned merit in the Artiſts whom we rewarded, we might do ſomething to animate, and to guide them in their future attempts.

I AM truly ſenſible how unequal I have been to the expreſſion of my own ideas. To develope the latent excellencies, and draw out the interior principles of our art, requires more ſkill and practice in writing, than is likely to be poſſeſſed by a man perpetually occupied in the uſe of the pencil and the pallet. It is for that reaſon, perhaps, that the ſiſter Art has had the advantage of better criticiſm. Poets are naturally writers of proſe. They may be ſaid to be practiſing only an inferior department of their own art, when they are explaining and expatiating upon its moſt refined principles.

BUT ſtill ſuch difficulties ought not to deter Artiſts who are not prevented by other engagements from putting their thoughts in order as well as they can, and from giving to the public the reſult of their experience. The knowledge which an Artiſt has of his ſubject will more than compenſate for any want of elegance in the manner of treating it, or even of perſpicuity, which is ſtill more eſſential; and I am convinced that one ſhort eſſay written by a Painter, will contribute more to advance the theory of our art, than a thouſand volumes ſuch as we ſometimes ſee, the purpoſe of which appears to be rather to diſplay the refinement of the Author's own conceptions of impoſſible practice, than to convey uſeful know-

ledge or inſtruction of any kind whatever. An Artiſt knows what is, and what is not, within the province of his art to perform, and is not likely to be for ever teazing the poor Student with the beauties of mixed paſſions, or to perplex him with an imaginary union of excellencies incompatible with each other.

To this work, however, I could not be ſaid to come totally unprovided with materials. I had ſeen much, and I had thought much upon what I had ſeen; I had ſomething of an habit of inveſtigation, and a diſpoſition to reduce all, that I obſerved and felt in my own mind, to method and ſyſtem; but never having ſeen what I myſelf knew, diſtinctly placed before me on paper, I knew nothing correctly.

To put thoſe ideas into ſomething like order was, to my inexperience, no eaſy taſk. The compoſition, the *ponere totum* even of a ſingle Diſcourſe, as well as of a ſingle ſtatue, was the moſt difficult part, as perhaps it is of every other art, and moſt requires the hand of a maſter.

For the manner, whatever deficiency there was, I might reaſonably expect indulgence, but I thought it indiſpenſibly

indiſpenſibly neceſſary well to conſider the opinions which were to be given out from this place, and under the ſanction of a Royal Academy; I therefore examined not only my own opinions, but likewiſe the opinions of others. I found in the courſe of this reſearch, many precepts and rules eſtabliſhed in our art, which did not ſeem to me altogether reconcileable with each other, yet each ſeemed in itſelf to have the ſame claim of being ſupported by truth and nature; and this claim, irreconcileable as they may be thought, they do in reality alike poſſeſs.

To clear away thoſe difficulties, and reconcile thoſe contrary opinions, it became neceſſary to diſtinguiſh the greater truth, as it may be called, from the leſſer truth; the larger and more liberal idea of nature from the more narrow and confined; that which addreſſes itſelf to the imagination, from that which is ſolely addreſſed to the eye. In conſequence of this diſcrimination, the different branches of our art, to which thoſe different truths were referred, were perceived to make ſo wide a ſeparation, and put on ſo new an appearance as if they had ſcarce proceeded from the ſame general ſtock. The different rules and regulations, which preſided over each department of art, followed of courſe: every mode

mode of excellence, from the grand ſtile of the Roman and Florentine ſchools down to the loweſt rank of ſtill life, had its due weight and value; fitted ſome claſs or other; and nothing was thrown away. By this diſpoſition of our art into claſſes, that perplexity and confuſion, which I apprehend every Artiſt has at ſome time experienced from the variety of ſtiles, the variety of excellence with which he is ſurrounded, is, I ſhould hope, in ſome meaſure removed, and the Student better enabled to judge for himſelf, what peculiarly belongs to his own particular purſuit.

In reviewing my Diſcourſes, it is no ſmall ſatisfaction to be aſſured that I have, in no part of them, lent my aſſiſtance to foſter *newly-hatched unfledged* opinions, or endeavoured to ſupport paradoxes, however tempting may have been their novelty, or however ingenious I might, for the minute, fancy them to be, nor I hope ſhall I any where be found to have impoſed on the minds of young Students declamation for argument, a ſmooth period for a ſound precept. I have purſued a plain and *honeſt method*; I have taken up the art ſimply as I found it exemplified in the practice of the moſt approved Painters. That approbation which the world has uniformly given, I have endeavoured to juſtify by ſuch proofs

proofs as queſtions of this kind will admit, by the analogy which Painting holds with the ſiſter Arts, and conſequently by the common congeniality which they all bear to our nature. And though in what has been done, no new diſcovery is pretended, I may ſtill flatter myſelf, that from the diſcoveries which others have made by their own intuitive good ſenſe and native rectitude of judgment, I have ſucceeded in eſtabliſhing the rules and principles of our Art on a more firm and laſting foundation than they had formerly been placed.

WITHOUT wiſhing to divert the Student from the practice of his Art to ſpeculative theory, to make him a mere Connoiſſeur inſtead of a Painter, I cannot but remark, that he will certainly find his account in conſidering once for all, on what ground the fabric of our Art is built.

UNCERTAIN, confuſed, or erroneous opinions are not only detrimental to an Artiſt in their immediate operation, but may poſſibly have very ſerious conſequences; affect his conduct, and give the peculiar character (as it may be called) to his taſte, and to his purſuits, through his whole life.

I was acquainted at Rome, in the early part of my life, with a Student of the French Academy, who appeared to me to poſſeſs all the qualities to make a great Artiſt, if he had ſuffered his taſte and feelings, and I may add even his prejudices, to have fair play. He ſaw and felt the excellencies of the great works of Art with which we were ſurrounded, but lamented that there was not to be found that Nature which is ſo admirable in the inferior ſchools, and he ſuppoſed with Felibien, Du Piles, and other Theoriſts, that ſuch an union of different excellencies would be the perfection of Art. He was not aware, that the narrow idea of Nature of which he lamented the abſence, in the works of thoſe great Artiſts, would have deſtroyed the grandeur of general ideas which he admired, and which was indeed the cauſe of his admiration. My opinions being then confuſed and unſettled, I was in danger of being borne down by this kind of plauſible reaſon, though I remember I then had a dawning of ſuſpicion that it was not ſound doctrine; and at the ſame time I was unwilling obſtinately to refuſe aſſent to what I was unable to confute.

That the young Artiſt may not be ſeduced from the right path, by following what, at firſt view, he may think the light of Reaſon, and which is indeed Reaſon in

in part, but not in the whole, has been much the object of thoſe Diſcourſes.

I HAVE taken every opportunity of recommending a rational method of ſtudy as of the laſt importance. The great, I may ſay the ſole uſe of an Academy is to put, and for ſome time to keep, Students in that courſe; that too much indulgence may not be given to peculiarity, nor a young man taught to believe, that what is generally good for others is not good for him.

I HAVE ſtrongly inculcated in my former Diſcourſes, as I do in this my laſt, the wiſdom and neceſſity of previouſly obtaining the appropriated inſtruments of the Art, in a firſt correct deſign, and a plain manly colouring, before any thing more is attempted. But by this I would not wiſh to cramp and fetter the mind, or diſcourage thoſe who follow (as moſt of us may at one time have followed) the ſuggeſtion of a ſtrong inclination: ſomething muſt be conceded to great and irreſiſtible impulſes: perhaps every Student muſt not be ſtrictly bound to general methods, if they ſtrongly thwart the peculiar turn of his own mind. I muſt confeſs, that it is not abſolutely of much conſequence whether he proceeds in the general method of ſeeking firſt to acquire mechanical

mechanical accuracy, before he attempts poetical flights, provided he diligently ſtudies to attain the full perfection of the ſtyle he purſues; whether like Parmegiano, he endeavours at grace and grandeur of manner before he has learned correctneſs of drawing, if like him he feels his own wants, and will labour, as that eminent Artiſt did, to ſupply thoſe wants; whether he ſtarts from the Eaſt or from the Weſt, if he relaxes in no exertion to arrive ultimately at the ſame goal. The firſt public work of Parmegiano is the St. Euſtachius, in the church of St. Petronius in Bologna, and done when he was a boy; and one of the laſt of his works is the Moſes breaking the tables, in Parma. In the former there is certainly ſomething of grandeur in the outline, and in the conception of the figure, which diſcovers the dawnings of future greatneſs, of a young mind impregnated with the ſublimity of Michael Angelo, whoſe ſtile he here attempts to imitate, though he could not then draw the human figure with any common degree of correctneſs. But this ſame Parmegiano, when in his more mature age he painted the Moſes, had ſo completely ſupplied his firſt defects, that we are at a loſs which to admire moſt, the correctneſs of drawing, or the grandeur of the conception. As a confirmation of its great excellence, and of the impreſſion which it leaves on the minds of elegant ſpectators,

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our great Lyric Poet, when he conceived that ſublime idea of the indignant Welch Bard, acknowledged that though many years had intervened, he had warmed his imagination with the remembrance of this noble figure of Parmegiano.

When we conſider that Michael Angelo was the great archetype to whom Parmegiano was indebted for that grandeur which we find in his works, and from whom all his cotemporaries and ſucceſſors have derived, whatever they have poſſeſſed, of the dignified and the majeſtic; that he was the bright luminary, from whom Painting has borrowed a new luſtre; that under his hands it aſſumed a new appearance, and is become another and ſuperior art; I may be excuſed if I take this opportunity, as I have hitherto taken every occaſion, to turn your attention to this exalted Founder and Father of modern Art, of which he was not only the inventor, but which he, by the divine energy of his own mind, carried at once to its higheſt point of poſſible perfection.

The ſudden maturity to which Michael Angelo brought our Art, and the comparative feebleneſs of his followers and imitators, might perhaps be reaſonably, at leaſt plauſibly explained, if we had time for ſuch an ex-

amination. At preſent I ſhall only obſerve, that the ſubordinate parts of our Art, and perhaps of other Arts, expand themſelves by a ſlow and progreſſive growth, but thoſe which depend on a native vigour of imagination generally burſt forth at once in fullneſs of beauty. Of this Homer probably, and Shakſpear, more aſſuredly are ſignal examples. Michael Angelo poſſeſſed the poetical part to a moſt eminent degree; and the ſame daring ſpirit, which urged him firſt to explore the unknown regions of the imagination, delighted with the novelty, and animated by the ſucceſs of his diſcoveries, could not have failed to ſtimulate and impel him forward in his career beyond thoſe limits which his followers, deſtitute of the ſame incentives, had not ſtrength to paſs.

To diſtinguiſh between correctneſs of drawing, and that part which reſpects the imagination, we may ſay the one approaches to the mechanical (which in its way too may make juſt pretenſions to genius) and the other to the poetical. To encourage a ſolid and vigorous courſe of ſtudy, it may not be amiſs to ſuggeſt that perhaps a confidence in the mechanic produces boldneſs in the poetic. He that is ſure of the goodneſs of his ſhip and tackle puts out fearleſly from the ſhore; and he who knows, that his hand can execute whatever his fancy

fancy can ſuggeſt, ſports with more freedom in embodying the viſionary forms of his own creation. I will not ſay Michael Angelo was eminently poetical, only becauſe he was greatly mechanical; but I am ſure that mechanic excellence invigorated and emboldened his mind to carry Painting into the regions of Poetry, and to emulate that Art in its moſt adventurous flights.

MICHAEL ANGELO equally poſſeſſed both qualifications. Yet of the former there were certainly great examples to be found in Ancient Sculpture, and particularly in the fragment known by the name of the Torſo of Michael Angelo; but of that grandeur of character, air, and attitude, which he threw into all his figures, and which ſo well correſponds with the grandeur of his outline, there was no example; they could therefore proceed only from the moſt poetical and ſublime imagination.

IT is impoſſible not to expreſs ſome ſurpriſe, that the race of Painters, who preceded Michael Angelo, men of acknowledged great abilities, ſhould never have thought of transferring a little of that grandeur of outline which they could not but ſee and admire in Ancient Sculpture, into their own works; but they appear to have conſidered

ſidered Sculpture as the later ſchools of Artiſts look at the inventions of Michael Angelo, as ſomething to be admired, but with which they have nothing to do. *Quod ſuper nos, nihil ad nos.*—The Artiſts of that age, even Raphael himſelf, ſeemed to be going on very contentedly in the dry manner of Pietro Perugino, and if Michael Angelo had never appeared, the Art might ſtill have continued in the ſame ſtile.

Besides Rome and Florence, where the grandeur of this ſtile was firſt diſplayed, it was on this foundation that the Caracci built the truly great Academical Bolognian School, of which the firſt ſtone was laid by Pellegrino Tibaldé. He firſt introduced this ſtile amongſt them; and many inſtances might be given in which he appears to have poſſeſſed as by inheritance, the true, genuine, noble and elevated mind of Michael Angelo. Though we cannot venture to ſpeak of him with the ſame fondneſs as his countrymen, and call him, as the Caracci did, *Noſtro Michael Angelo reformato*, yet he has a right to be conſidered amongſt the firſt and greateſt of his followers: there are certainly many drawings and inventions of his, of which Michael Angelo himſelf might not diſdain to be ſuppoſed the Author, or that they ſhould be, as in fact they often are, miſtaken for his. I will

will mention one particular inſtance, becauſe it is found in a book which is in every young Artiſt's hands—Biſhop's Antient Statues. He there has introduced a print, repreſenting Polyphemus, from a drawing of Tibaldi, and has inſcribed it with the name of Michael Angelo, to whom he has alſo in the ſame book attributed a Sybil of Raphael. Both theſe figures, it is true, are profeſſedly in Michael Angelo's ſtile and ſpirit, and even worthy of his hand. But we know that the former is painted in the Inſtitute a Bologna by Tibaldi, and the other in the *Pace* by Raphael.

The Caracci, it is acknowledged, adopted the mechanical part with ſufficient ſucceſs. But the divine part which addreſſes itſelf to the imagination as poſſeſſed by Michael Angelo or Tibaldi, was beyond their graſp: they formed, however, a moſt reſpectable ſchool, a ſtile more on the level, and calculated to pleaſe a greater number; and if excellence of this kind is to be valued according to the number, rather than the weight and quality of admirers, it would aſſume even an higher rank in Art. The ſame may be, in ſome ſort, ſaid of the Venetian Painters. They certainly much advanced the dignity of their ſtile by adding to their faſcinating powers of colouring ſomething of the ſtrength of Michael Angelo;

at the ſame time it may ſtill be a doubt how far their ornamental elegance would be an advantageous addition to his grandeur. But if there is any manner of Painting which may be ſaid to unite kindly with his ſtile, it is that of Titian. His handling, the manner in which his colours are left on the canvas, appears to proceed (as far as that goes) from a congenial mind, equally diſdainful of vulgar criticiſm.

MICHAEL ANGELO's ſtrength thus qualified, and made more palatable to the general taſte, reminds me of an obſervation which I heard * a learned critic make, when it was incidentally remarked, that our tranſlation of Homer, however excellent, did not convey the character, nor had the grand air of the original. He replied, that if Pope had not cloathed the naked majeſty of Homer with the graces and elegancies of modern faſhions, though the real dignity of Homer was degraded by ſuch a dreſs, his tranſlation would not have met with ſuch a favourable reception, and he muſt have been contented with fewer readers.

MANY of the Flemiſh Painters, who ſtudied at Rome, in that great æra of our Art, ſuch as Francis Floris,

* Dr. Johnſon.

Hemſkerk,

Hemſkerk, Michael Coxis, Jerom Cock, and others, returned to their own country, with as much of this grandeur as they could carry. But like ſeeds, falling on a ſoil not prepared or adapted to their nature, the manner of Michael Angelo thrived but little with them; perhaps, however, they contributed to prepare the way for that free, unconſtrained, and liberal outline, which was afterwards introduced by Rubens, through the medium of the Venetian Painters.

This grandeur of ſtile has been in different degrees diſſeminated all over Europe. Some caught it by living at the time, and coming into contact with the original author, whilſt others received it at ſecond hand; and being every where adopted, it has totally changed the whole taſte and ſtile of deſign, if there could be ſaid to be any ſtile before his time. Our art, in conſequence, now aſſumes a rank to which it could never have dared to aſpire, if Michael Angelo had not diſcovered to the world the hidden powers which it poſſeſſed. Without his aſſiſtance we never could have been convinced, that Painting was capable of producing an adequate repreſentation of the perſons and actions of the heroes of the Iliad.

I would aſk any man qualified to judge of ſuch works, whether he can look with indifference at the perſonification of the Supreme Being in the centre of the Capella Seſtina, or the figures of the Sybils which ſurround that chapel, to which we may add the ſtatue of Moſes; and whether the ſame ſenſations are not excited by thoſe works, as what he may remember to have felt from the moſt ſublime paſſages of Homer? I mention thoſe figures more particularly, as they come nearer to a compariſon with his Jupiter, his demi-gods, and heroes; thoſe Sybils and Prophets being a kind of intermediate beings between Men and Angels. Though inſtances may be produced in the works of other Painters, which may juſtly ſtand in competition with thoſe I have mentioned, ſuch as the Iſaiah, and the Viſion of Ezekiel, by Raphael, the St. Mark of Frate Bartolomeo, and many others; yet theſe, it muſt be allowed, are inventions ſo much in Michael Angelo's manner of thinking, that they may be truly conſidered as ſo many rays, which diſcover manifeſtly the center from whence they emanated.

The ſublime in Painting, as in Poetry, ſo overpowers, and takes ſuch a poſſeſſion of the whole mind, that no room is left for attention to minute criticiſm. The little

little elegancies of art in the preſence of theſe great ideas thus greatly expreſſed, loſe all their value, and are, for the inſtant at leaſt, felt to be unworthy of our notice. The correct judgment, the purity of taſte, which characteriſe Raphael; the exquiſite grace of Corregio and Parmegiano, all diſappear before them.

That Michael Angelo was capricious in his inventions, cannot be denied; and this may make ſome circumſpection neceſſary in ſtudying his works; for though they appear to become him, an imitation of them is always dangerous, and will prove ſometimes ridiculous. "In that dread circle none durſt tread but he." To me, I confeſs, his caprice does not lower the eſtimation of his genius, even though it is ſometimes, I acknowledge, carried to the extreme: and however thoſe eccentric excurſions are conſidered, we muſt at the ſame time recollect, that thoſe faults, if they are faults, are ſuch as never could occur to a mean and vulgar mind; that they flowed from the ſame ſource which produced his greateſt beauties, and were therefore ſuch as none but himſelf was capable of committing; they were the powerful impulſes of a mind unuſed to ſubjection of any kind, and too high to be controled by cold criticiſm.

MANY ſee his daring extravagance, who can ſee nothing elſe. A young Artiſt finds the works of Michael Angelo ſo totally different from thoſe of his own maſter, or of thoſe with whom he is ſurrounded, that he may be eaſily perſuaded to abandon and neglect ſtudying a ſtile, which appears to him wild, myſterious, and above his comprehenſion, and which he therefore feels no diſpoſition to admire; a good diſpoſition, which he concludes that he ſhould naturally have, if the ſtile deſerved it. It is neceſſary therefore that Students ſhould be prepared for the diſappointment which they may experience at their firſt ſetting out; and they muſt be cautioned, that probably they will not, at firſt ſight, approve.

IT muſt be remembered, that as this great ſtile itſelf is artificial in the higheſt degree, it preſuppoſes in the Spectator, a cultivated and prepared artificial ſtate of mind. It is an abſurdity therefore to ſuppoſe we are born with this taſte, though we are with the ſeeds of it, which by the heat and kindly influence of his genius, may be ripened in us.

A * LATE Philoſopher and Critic has obſerved, ſpeaking of taſte, that *we are on no account to expect that fine*

* James Harris, Eſq.

*things*

*things ſhould deſcend to us*,—our taſte, if poſſible, muſt be made to aſcend to them. The ſame learned Writer recommends to us *even to feign a reliſh, till we find a reliſh come; and feel, that what began in fiction, terminates in reality.* If there be in our Art, any thing of that agreement or compact, ſuch as I apprehend there is in Muſic, with which the Critic is neceſſarily required previouſly to be acquainted, in order to form a correct judgment; the compariſon with this Art will illuſtrate what I have ſaid on theſe points, and tend to ſhew the probability, we may ſay the certainty, that men are not born with a reliſh for thoſe Arts in their moſt refined ſtate, which as they cannot underſtand, they cannot be impreſſed with their effects. This great ſtile of Michael Angelo is as far removed from the ſimple repreſentation of the common objects of nature, as the moſt refined Italian muſic is, from the inartificial notes of nature, from whence they both profeſs to originate. But, without ſuch a ſuppoſed compact, we may be very confident that the higheſt ſtate of refinement in either of thoſe Arts will not be reliſhed without a long and induſtrious attention.

In purſuing this great Art, it muſt be acknowledged that we labour under greater difficulties than thoſe who were

were born in the age of its diſcovery, and whoſe minds from their infancy were habituated to this ſtile, who learnt it as language, as their mother tongue. They had no mean taſte to unlearn; they needed no perſuaſive diſcourſe to allure them to a favourable reception of it, no abſtruſe inveſtigation of its principles to convince them of the great latent truths on which it is founded. We are conſtrained, in theſe later days, to have recourſe to a ſort of Grammar and Dictionary, as the only means of recovering a dead language. It was by them learnt by rote, and perhaps better learnt that way than by precept.

The ſtile of Michael Angelo, which I have compared to language, and which may, poetically ſpeaking, be called the language of the Gods, now no longer exiſts, as it did in the fifteenth century, yet with the aid of diligence, we may in a great meaſure ſupply the deficiency which I mentioned, of not having his works ſo perpetually before our eyes; by having recourſe to caſts from his models and deſigns in Sculpture; to drawings or even copies of thoſe drawings; to prints, which however ill executed, ſtill convey ſomething by which this taſte may be formed; and a reliſh may be fixed and eſtabliſhed in our minds for this grand ſtile

of

of invention. Some examples of this kind we have in the Academy; and I ſincerely wiſh there were more, that the younger Students might, in their firſt nouriſhment, imbibe this taſte; whilſt others, though ſettled in the practice of the common-place ſtile of Painting, might infuſe, by this means, a grandeur into their works.

I SHALL now make ſome remarks on the courſe which I think moſt proper to be purſued in ſuch a ſtudy. I wiſh you not to go ſo much to the derivative ſtreams, as to the fountain head; though the copies are not to be neglected; becauſe they may give you hints in what manner you may copy, and how the genius of one man may be made to fit the peculiar manner of another.

To recover this loſt taſte, I would recommend young Artiſts to ſtudy the works of Michael Angelo, as he himſelf did the works of the ancient Sculptors; he began, when a child, a copy of a mutilated Satyr's head, and finiſhed in his model what was wanting in the original. In the ſame manner, the firſt exerciſe that I would recommend to the young Artiſt when he firſt attempts invention, is to ſelect every figure, if poſſible, from the inventions of Michael Angelo. If ſuch borrowed figures will not bend to his purpoſe, and he is conſtrained to make a

change or ſupply a figure himſelf, that figure will neceſſarily be in the ſame ſtile with the reſt, and his taſte will by this means be naturally initiated, and nurſed in the lap of grandeur. He will ſooner perceive what conſtitutes this grand ſtile by one practical trial than by a thouſand ſpeculations, and he will in ſome ſort procure to himſelf that advantage which in theſe later ages has been denied him; the advantage of having the greateſt of Artiſts for his maſter and inſtructor.

The next leſſon ſhould be, to change the purpoſe of the figures without changing the attitude, as Tintoret has done with the Sampſon of Michael Angelo. Inſtead of the figure which Sampſon beſtrides, he has placed an eagle under him, and inſtead of the jaw-bone, thunder and lightening in his right hand, and it becomes a Jupiter. Titian, in the ſame manner, has taken the figure which repreſents God dividing the light from the darkneſs in the vault of the Capella Seſtina, and has introduced it in the famous battle of Cadore, ſo much celebrated by Vaſari, and extraordinary as it may ſeem, it is here converted to a General, falling from his horſe. A real judge who ſhould look at this picture, would immediately pronounce the attitude of that figure to be in a greater ſtile than any other figure

of

of the compoſition. Theſe two inſtances may be ſufficient, though many more might be given in their works, as well as in thoſe of other great Artiſts.

When the Student has been habituated to this grand conception of the Art, when the reliſh for this ſtile is eſtabliſhed, makes a part of himſelf, and is woven into his mind, he will, by this time, have got a power of ſelecting from whatever occurs in nature that is grand, and correſponds with that taſte which he has now acquired, and will paſs over whatever is common-place and inſipid. He may then bring to the mart ſuch works of his own proper invention as may enrich and increaſe the general ſtock of invention in our Art.

I am confident of the truth and propriety of the advice which I have recommended; at the ſame time I am aware how much by this advice, I have laid myſelf open to the ſarcaſms of thoſe critics who imagine our Art to be a matter of inſpiration. But I ſhould be ſorry it ſhould appear even to myſelf that I wanted that courage which I have recommended to the Students in another way: equal courage perhaps is required in the adviſer and the adviſed; they both muſt equally dare

dare and bid defiance to narrow criticiſm and vulgar opinion.

That the Art has been in a gradual ſtate of decline, from the age of Michael Angelo to the preſent, muſt be acknowledged; and we may reaſonably impute this declenſion to the ſame cauſe to which the ancient Critics and Philoſophers have imputed the corruption of eloquence. Indeed the ſame cauſes are likely at all times and in all ages to produce the ſame effects: indolence—not taking the ſame pains—deſiring to find a ſhorter way—is the general imputed cauſe. The words of Petronius * are very remarkable. After oppoſing the natural chaſte beauty of the eloquence of former ages to the ſtrained inflated ſtile then in faſhion, "neither," ſays he, "has the art of Painting had a better fate, "after the boldneſs of the Egyptians had found out "a compendious way to execute ſo great an art."

By *compendious*, I underſtand him to mean a mode of Painting, ſuch as has infected the ſtile of the later Painters of Italy and France; common-place without thought, and with as little trouble, working as by a receipt

* Pictura quoque non alium exitum fecit poſtquam Ægyptiorum audacia tam magnæ artis compendiariam invenit.

receipt, in contradiſtinction from that ſtile for which even a reliſh cannot be acquired without care and long attention, and moſt certainly the power of executing, not without the moſt laborious application.

I HAVE endeavoured to ſtimulate the ambition of Artiſts to tread in this great path of glory, and, as well as I can, have pointed out the track which leads to it, and have at the ſame time told them the price at which it may be obtained. It is an ancient ſaying, that labour is the price which the Gods have ſet upon every thing valuable.

THE great Artiſt, who has been ſo much the ſubject of the preſent Diſcourſe, was diſtinguiſhed even from his infancy for his indefatigable diligence; and this was continued through his whole life, till prevented by extreme old age. The pooreſt of men, as he obſerved himſelf, did not labour from neceſſity, more than he did from choice. Indeed, from all the circumſtances related of his life, he appears not to have had the leaſt conception that his art was to be acquired by any other means than by great labour; and yet he, of all men that ever lived, might make the greateſt pretenſions to the efficacy of native genius and inſpiration. I can

have no doubt that he would have thought it no diſgrace to have it ſaid of him, as he himſelf ſaid of Raphael, * that he did not poſſeſs his art from nature, but by long ſtudy. He was conſcious that the great excellence to which he arrived was gained by dint of labour, and was unwilling to have it thought that any tranſcendant ſkill, however natural its effects might ſeem, could be purchaſed at a cheaper price than he had paid for it. This ſeems to have been the true drift of his obſervation. We cannot ſuppoſe it made with any intention of depreciating the genius of Raphael, of whom he always ſpoke, as Condivi ſays, with the greateſt reſpect: though they were rivals, no ſuch illiberality exiſted between them; and Raphael on his part entertained the greateſt veneration for Michael Angelo, as appears from the ſpeech which is recorded of him, that he congratulated himſelf, and thanked God that he was born in the ſame age.

If the high eſteem and veneration in which Michael Angelo has been held by all nations and in all ages, ſhould be put to the account of prejudice, it muſt ſtill be granted that thoſe prejudices could not have been entertained

* "*Che Raffaello non ebbe queſt' arte da natura ma per lungo ſtudio.*"

entertained without a cauſe: the ground of our prejudice then becomes the ſource of our admiration. But from whatever it proceeds, or whatever it is called, it will not, I hope, be thought preſumptuous in me to appear in the train, I cannot ſay of his imitators, but of his admirers. I have taken another courſe, one more ſuited to my abilities, and to the taſte of the times in which I live. Yet however unequal I feel myſelf to that attempt, were I now to begin the world again, I would tread in the ſteps of that great maſter: to kiſs the hem of his garment; to catch the ſlighteſt of his perfections, would be glory and diſtinction enough for an ambitious man.

I FEEL a ſelf-congratulation in knowing myſelf capable of ſuch ſenſations as he intended to excite. I reflect not without vanity, that theſe Diſcourſes bear teſtimony of my admiration of that truly divine man, and I ſhould deſire that the laſt words which I ſhould pronounce in this Academy, and from this place, might be the name of—MICHAEL ANGELO.

FINIS.